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A Romance of the Footlights

By JEROME HUNTLEY

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A ROMANCE OF THE FOOTLIGHTS

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IRENE LANGHAM—otherwise Madeline Winthrop—an auburn haired beauty, between seventeen and eighteen,—of quick intelligence,—with a dainty, slightly turned up nose, tempting lips and rosy cheeks—deep blue eyes, and an exquisitely modelled figure, was born and brought up in a thriving inland town, on the New York Central Railroad, where she lived in fairly comfortable circumstances with her widowed mother; she was extremely romantic and of an inquisitive nature, and whenever a theatrical troupe appeared at the "Opera House" in her native town, she always "took in" the show,—for she had beaux *galore*, who were only too anxious to escort her, for the pleasure of being in the company of this pure, light-hearted, frolicsome maiden.

Thus it happened, that in time, Madeline Winthrop became "stage struck"—and hied herself to New York,—where as—Irene Langham,—she soon became a member of the chorus in one of the Broadway theatres. If, in her rural home, she had many sweethearts, it was not to be wondered at, that she soon captivated a score of metropolitan admirers, with her fresh, animated, youthful beauty.

A silk lined flat,—flowers,—diamonds,—and et-ceteras, together with late suppers and champagne, soon became a portion of her daily existence, midst the whirl of the giddy throng in the gay metropolis; but Irene, while

indulging in these new-found luxuries, was, at all times, particularly circumspect in her behavior.

She numbered amongst her constant attendants quite a number of collegians ;—freshmen, —sophomores, —juniors and seniors, together with several "club men,"—and well-to-do "men about town."—One young "Johnnie," with sporting proclivities, was particularly "gone" on her, and, when he was absent from the city, deluged her with voluminous correspondence filled with love and emotional effusions, sometimes he was poetically inclined, and on one occasion, sent her the following:

TO IRENE.

She's full of innocent surprise,
And I know that she is wise,
For she is strictly in it,
Just mind now what I say,
The morning papers she devours,
And she lingers for an hour,
Reading all the sporty things
That happen on Broadway.

Sport for the salesman, sport for the clerk,
They all like to sport around after their work,
Sport for the married men,—deceiving their wives,
Sport for the single men, living fast lives.

Sport for the mechanic,—and sport for the boss,
Sport for the countryman,—who laughs like a horse,
Sport for the beggars,—who are asking for coin,
They reap a rich harvest in the Tenderloin.

Sport for the banker, the bells and the bears,
Sporting on Broadway, on a sporty old tear,
Sport for reporters looking for news,
Sport for the bums, who are looking for booze.

Sport for the racing man, looking for tips,
Sport for the loser,—who is biting his lips,
Sport for the old,—and sport for the young,
Sporting on Broadway, when night has begun.

But the greatest sport of all,
In summer, spring or fall,
Is when I can be near,
The one that I call "dear,"
And enjoy a high old time,
Billing, cooing,—drinking wine,
With the dearest girl e'er seen,
That's my darling, sweet Irene.

There are some strange things done, and some extraordinary compositions evolved, by those who are yearning for the "love of an actress."

It can easily be surmised therefore, that, with so many "on her string," her life both before and behind the scenes, was a constant ripple of pleasurable excitement, but to her *credit* be it said, there was absolutely nothing between Irene and her most ardent admirers, except an occasional *kiss*, delivered at the front door, and a sweet "good night"—before she went up stairs to her "flat," with "ma,"—who had come to New York to keep a maternal eye on her only child.

The almost devotional attention from several extremely fervent admirers, who were always very liberal with their presents, did not however, cause Irene to lose her *heart*,—but their continual flattery completely turned her *head*,—she was constantly reminded by them, that she was "too good for the chorus."

Half-tone pictures of her pretty face and figure were frequently seen in many of the weekly and monthly magazines, and in the Sunday editions of the big dailies, and they invariably referred to her, as "one of the beauties of the stage;" while the prominent photographers were only too glad to have her pay a visit to their studios, and supply her with photos—*ad lib*—gratis. Thus it was, that Irene Langham was lured to her fate.

She had been connected with the theatrical profession about six months, but, beyond standing in the front row, or occasionally blossoming out as one of six or twelve girls, to do a song and chorus, or a short dance, she never had an opportunity of exhibiting

the talent, she herself was convinced she possessed; finally her chance came. One of the second soubrettes was absent—and Irene at her own earnest solicitation, was entrusted with the part—a very minor one to be sure, in which she acquitted herself very creditably with the few short speeches she had to say, but this was only for two nights and one matinee, and, when the absentee returned, Irene was completely undone, for her friends had been in constant attendance during these three performances, especially as she was “playing a part,” and their presumably well meant, effusive compliments about her “acting,” made her *believe* she was really a full fledged actress, so, when she was told she must “go back in the line,” she promptly passed her notice to the manager, and closed her engagement.—This was almost a little tragedy in Irene’s theatrical life, but it must be remembered, it was brought about by the mis-directed flattery of her friends.

She had heard of the Lotties—and Mays—and Jennies and Fannies, who were “headliners” in the Continuous Vaudevilles, getting salaries that leading ladies and comic operatic stars could only dream of. She was certain she could sing as good as Lottie Lottimore and many others. She constantly visited Keith’s, Tony Pastor’s, Proctor’s and Koster and Bial’s, and took stock of the *style* and *business* of the serio-comic comediennes, who had become favorites. The more she saw of these “turns,” the more she was convinced that she was meant for the vaudeville. She was sure she would soon become *great*, “if she only had the chance.” She was partially familiar with a few of the latest songs, she would

learn them thoroughly, and get some new ones. Looking through the theatrical journals carefully, she saw just what she wanted; she was therein informed, where she could obtain all the new songs—and also parodies on current successes,—full of “wit, grammar, metre and sense;” also where she could be provided with original “stage business,” and learn—the latest style of dancing so much in vogue in the continuous houses. What more could she desire? For the next two weeks she was a constant visitor at the principal music publishers, where an obliging piauist in attendance, was only too willing to teach her the latest “hits,”—and she had given her order, with the requisite deposit, to a celebrated parodist and song writer, for an original special song. She also devoted an hour each morning (Sunday excepted), with a well known teacher of stage dancing. In due time, she called for her “special song,” which the author declared would “bring down the house,” for he was *sure* it would suit her style exactly. So, after several more weeks of practice and study, she felt she was prepared to tackle the Vaudevilles.

Accordingly one morning Irene and her Ma, presented themselves at a Vaudeville Agency in the vicinity of Union Square. After considerable perseverance, she obtained an appearance at an uptown benefit. She was a little “flustered” when she first approached the footlights to sing “all by herself,” but the cordial reception and reassuring smiles of those in front gave her confidence and she proceeded;—she had not progressed very far however, when it was evident that the indulgent audience, “gave her their sympathies;”

in fact it may as well be said, they actually pitied her. She reproduced all the *defects* she had seen in others—she would cast a killing glance to the right of the balcony, then to the left,—then throw a kiss to the gallery;—then the leader of the orchestra received a sweet smile, as though he and Irene, were old friends—she would then promenade across the front of the stage, with a cake-walk shuffle—then she wriggled, and then she giggled—and with a merry laugh and a naughty little wink, she would raise the skirt of her dress sufficiently high, to show her dainty *lingerie*—as she had seen others do,—in fact she disported herself by trying to imitate all the familiar tricks and twists, she had been witnessing and studying of late, and seemed determined to worm herself *physically* into the good graces of those in front; so after her two songs, she bowed and smiled resplendantly,—then waved her hand, and retired from the stage, receiving faint applause from the really kind audience, who, in the main—heaved a sigh of “thank goodness she’s gone.”—Why—oh why do those in charge of benefits allow this sort of thing?—Fortunately indeed for Irene, that her *turn* was for *charity*, for in her ambitious efforts, a fault of nearly all beginners, she *overdid* everything she attempted, and while she was naturally a very graceful girl, her over-anxiety to thoroughly imitate the experienced comedienne she had been studying, caused her to appear exceedingly clumsy and amateurish.

When she reached home, Irene told Ma that the audience was “awfully stingy with their applause,”—and vowed she would “never play at a benefit again,—and she didn’t.

From that night, she daily haunted all the agents, and upon each, she hurled the awful responsibility of wishing them to be her "sole agent,"—but for all that, engagements did not pour in. She would mildly expostulate—"what are the use of agents unless they get you engagements?"—Many persons whom she asked this—gave it up as a difficult conundrum.—Whenever she called she was put off with—"I've nothing to-day, Miss,"—or—"call to-morrow,"—or—"you might look in next Monday,"—(and this—on Tuesday). She kept on "looking in," and soon became well known to all the habitués on—"the corner"—and frequently, while going down Broadway, she would meet some of her old associates of the chorus—stopping to chat with them, telling them of the grand future she "knew was before her."

This thing of being continually put off "till to-morrow," surely could not go on forever, and Irene began to lose her patience—so did the agents.—One day she had called and received the stereotyped—"nothing to-day Miss"—when she began with—"well *really* now, can't you get me an opening *somewhere*?" Oh—er—ah—let me see "yes, there *is* something—where's that letter?" Ah, here it is, "I can send you for one week down to Norfolk."

What could you give me to follow?

"Perhaps you can get the next week at Richmond,—with Atlanta, Savannah, etc. to follow. Irene reckoned the railroad fares and the hotel bill for herself and Ma. and concluded it could hardly be made profitable; but just stop to consider answered the agent—"if you make a *hit*, out of town, and your

turn is a "go" over the southern circuit—I can easily place you in the Keith and Proctor houses, at big money; and after that, it will all be plain sailing, and I can book all your time solid, for the entire season, but remember, you must—"make good,"—for the Manager at Norfolk has at last consented to engage *one* strong act each week—a sort of *head-liner*, and has written to me to send him a 'dashing Serio Comic with a *New York reputation*'—so you will see what a chance is offered, and I only hope you can fill the bill."

So Irene concluded it was better than nothing, and besides, it would be a *start*. Yes, she would accept the engagement, and visions of how she would "knock them silly down in Norfolk," flashed before her, and besides, just think of her triumphal return to New York, and—how nice—all her time booked solid for the season. The pleasurable excitement at the prospect,—can only be fully realized and appreciated, by those aspiring and ambitious young comedienues who have passed in Irene's footsteps, and they secure their first *real engagement*—and just to think, it was to be a *head-liner* engagement; and she was to become an *important* "head-liner" in the Vaudeville business and similar thoughts, caused a thrill of joy to permeate Irene's throbbing heart.

The Saturday afternoon following, saw Irene and her Ma on board the steamship "Jefferson," of the Old Dominion Line, bound for Norfolk, they had agreed to go by steamer, as Irene wanted to enjoy the experience of her first sail on the ocean. She was in high spirits, and Ma had an anxious eye on the baggage which had just come on board.

Three large trunks labelled—"Irene Langham, Excelsior Music Hall, Norfolk, Va."—Irene's hand-bag also bore the legend "Irene Langham, Excelsior Music Hall, Norfolk, Va."—and an elegant Russian leather music roll, which contained Irene's orchestrations for her "turn," was also "tagged" with "Irene Langham, Excelsior Music Hall," etc., etc.—for she had been frequently cautioned and advised, that under *no* circumstances, must a travelling "Vaudeville Star" trust their music in their trunks—they must always carry it separate, so as to have it handy on arrival at the destination, for immediate use at rehearsal, in case the trunks should be delayed in delivery.

Some of the passengers whispered to each other, and cast wondering and inquisitive glances at Irene, who sat in a prominent position in the main saloon, while going down the bay. The inscription on her music roll, which lay upon her lap, was considerably talked about, and commented upon, and she was soon the center of attraction. This was just what Irene *wanted*. It is the old story with nearly every beginner, especially the *new* soubrettes and young Serio Comics. They want everybody to know they are in the "*profession*." Why not?—Besides Irene was a very pretty girl, elegantly and *extensively* dressed, which would naturally indicate that she was a high salaried *artiste*.—One young chappie, who had evidently been imbibing "high balls" and "Manhattan cocktails," actually walked across the cabin, right up in front of Irene and with a most profound bow, asked her if she wouldn't please sing just one song for the passengers.—but a malignant glare from "Ma"—sent him away, to

study navigation from the other end of the steamer.

Arriving at Norfolk, the first thing to be done, was to get located in a convenient hotel, and, as they had already been recommended to one, Irene and Ma entered a roomy old-fashioned Landau, and were soon on their way up-town.

Early October weather in Eastern Virginia, is perhaps, the most enjoyable of all the year, and on this particular morning, it was simply perfect;—a fragrant balmy breeze from the ocean, with the bright cloudless sky above, was all that could be desired—mother and daughter were both silent for a few minutes, when all of a sudden Irene caught sight of a large billboard at the street crossing.—“Oh, Ma—look, look—just see how they have billed me.—*I’m starred*;—they’ve advertised me in big letters—look! look!” Ma looked—sure enough there it was,—Irene’s name in large type on the play-bills. With almost childish glee, she clapped her hands in happy excitement, while she read:

EXCELSIOR MUSIC HALL

MONDAY, OCTOBER ———

SPECIAL ENGAGEMENT

OF THE

GREAT NEW YORK FAVORITE

IRENE LANGHAM

THE BEAUTIFUL

SERIO COMIC STAR.

If an artist of the canvas, could have caught the rapturous expression of delight that illuminated Irene's pretty face, the first moment she got a full glimpse of that blue and white "Poster," he would have had a picture, which would have riveted the attention of the most critical *connoisseur*.

The conversation which ensued between mother and daughter, was of nothing else but the "beautiful play bills," for they passed many more before they arrived at their destination, and the spasm of intense joy that Irene experienced, made her look perfectly radiant when she entered the hotel.

With almost feverish anxiety, Irene managed to pass the time away until ten o'clock Monday morning, when she took her orchestration, and started for the "Excelsior Music Hall;" arriving there, she was greatly disappointed by its outside appearance, but then she suddenly remembered, she was not in New York,—and Norfolk was so different, of course.—Ma in the meantime, was busy at the hotel putting a few finishing touches on Irene's most elaborate costume, which she was to wear that night.

Irene, after tugging violently for several minutes at the side door, which she thought must be the stage entrance, gave up in despair, and retraced her steps to the front of the building. The iron gate had been swung open, and an unkempt ragged negro boy, about fifteen years old, was sweeping out the dilapidated looking hallway, at the other end of which, was the entrance to the lower floor of the "hall." Irene asked the boy if he would show her the stage entrance, so she could get in for rehearsal. "Dey nebber has

any rehearsins heah Missy—de actors jess comes in at night, den dey goes on wi'out any practicin'." Irene was somewhat disconcerted at this—and then asked—"How many are there in the orchestra?"—"The boy grinned rather idiotically, showing a fine set of large perfect teeth—while Irene repeated her question.—"Oh yass," replied the boy suddenly comprehending her meaning—"Dere's tree men wots in de orchistry—one wot plays de pianny, de oder de corn't, and de oder one de fiddle. Is you gwine to "act out" here to-night, Missy?"—Irene replied in the affirmative—"I'se de property boy Missy, I is,—an' I done reckon I'll fix up your dressin' room—'cause you looks like a nice lady—an' if you'll done give me de check fo' your dressin'-room trunk, I'll see dat it gits in dar, all safe; my daddy hauls all de baggage fo' de show folks wot plays heah."—Irene informed him that her baggage was at the Belvidere Hotel, and that she would send her "theatre trunk" down during the afternoon. Then, after giving the boy fifty cents, she asked him to open the folding doors, so she could see inside. "Very sorry Missy, but de doors am locked, an' I ain't got no key, but if you'll kum back about twelve o'clock, de doors be open, for dats de time we starts de show."—"Never mind," said Irene, who, after looking around, met an old black "aunty," who had just come in, and who greeted Irene with—"Good mornin' lady—is you one of de show people wots gwine to play heah to-night?"—"Yes," replied Irene. "Well, I does all de washin' fo' de ladies wot works heah—werry reasonable too—twenty-five cents a dozen fo' small pieces and seventy-five cents a dozen fo' de big ones, and I garn'tee satisfaction."

Irene informed her that she did not need any laundry work at present, and stepping out into the street, retraced her steps to the hotel. She did not return however at twelve o'clock, but consoled herself during the afternoon with the fact, that she was the "Star" for a week in the "Excelsior Music Hall," and even though it was not an imposing looking theatre, who could tell what this engagement *might* lead to.

Night came, and Ma and Irene marched off to the "Excelsior." Ma was somewhat nervous like Irene, who, when she was called for her "turn," made her appearance in the "first entrance," and was greeted by the stage manager with a pleasant "good evening," and looking Irene thoroughly over he continued,—“You're certainly a *dream*, and you're sure to knock 'em a 'twister when they see you; there's a great house out there and all they want is '*ginger*,' so give them plenty of *hot stuff*.”

Before Irene could reply, the symphony of her first song was being played by “*de orchistry*,” so, putting on one of her most captivating smiles, she bounded on the stage, and beheld her audience. The dense fumes of tobacco smoke from numerous pipes and cheap cigars, almost took away her breath: as she gazed across the footlights, and saw the motley crowd before her, she received her first *real* “stage fright.” Her knees began to tremble and she shook like a leaf, and when she reached the centre of the stage she discovered that the stage manager was right, she certainly *did* “knock them a twister,” for, from all directions came such expressions as—“Ain't she a loo-loo,”—“She's a warm baby,”

—"Get on to her togs,"—"She looks like a ten-day winner,"—Irene you are a *daisy*,"—"You bet your life she's all right,"—"Pipe the sparkles,"—These and numerous other supposedly complimentary remarks, interspersed with—"Ohs"—and "wow-wows," together with vociferous hand clapping and loud stamping, was the reception accorded to "Irene Langham, the great New York favorite."

Certain it was, that no serio-comic singer had ever appeared on the stage of the "Excelsior," in such a stunning "get up." It must be here explained, that one of Irene's wealthy admirers had presented her with a very expensive and beautiful stage dress for her *début*.

This lovely "creation" was made of cream white satin and lace, cut very *décolleté*, elaborately trimmed with gold bullion and spangles, the skirt of which ended abruptly at the knee, showing her daintily embroidered transparent black silk stockings, and to heighten the effect she wore all her diamonds (and she had quite a few), together with a magnificent picture hat trimmed with eight large handsome ostrich feathers. In fact it is safe to say, that no comedienne, even though she were the *tip-topper* of all "head-liners" in the vaudeville, or any Farce Comedy *soubrette*, ever wore a more startling or beautiful costume, than did Irene Langham, on the first night of her appearance as a "Star." Besides it must be borne in mind, that she had a wealth of wavy auburn hair, and was a remarkably pretty girl, in the first flush of her young womanhood, and on this occasion she certainly looked "resplendant."

It was no great wonder then, that she created a real "sensation," when she burst in all

her splendor and loveliness before the astonished gaze of the patrons of the "Excelsior Music Hall."

After the hul-a-boo-loo of her reception had subsided, Irene partially regained her composure, and sang her first song. "This was the way he winked at me,"—The title of this composition would naturally suggest the making of "goo-goo eyes," which Irene took full advantage of, combined with all sorts of serio-comic gyrations, for in her anxiety to make a "hit," she overdid herself by her extravagant actions, and completely ruined the song, causing the audience to "titter" and laugh all through, and when she glided off the stage an indiscriminate yelling and whistling ensued which she mistook for an encore.

Irene's nerve had almost left her by this time, and she was really frightened, but the stage manager urged her to "go out quick," but she declined,—*"go ahead Irene, brace up, what's the use of your getting nervous, the're a little rough out there, but they're all right."*

So Irene plucked up courage and tried to smile again as she went on. This time she sang "Don't you think I'm a nice little girl?" She struggled through the first verse, but, when she had delivered the first two lines of the chorus:—

*"Don't you think—don't you think —
Don't you think I'm a nice little girl"*

she could get no further, for the entire audience seemed to coincide with the sentiment she was trying to express, and she was told—*"You bet you are," "You're a little beauty,"* etc., etc. These and sundry other coarse remarks, accompanied with ferocious holler-

ings, whistling, stamping and the rattling of beer glasses completely drowned her voice, which though pleasing was not very strong. She was gasping for breath and kept on trying to sing however, at the same time starting to make her exit, in "cake-walk rag time," but she was so frightened, she was quivering from her head to her heels as she disappeared behind the scenes.

This was the signal for a still further uproar and the audience fairly shrieked with terrific yells, which increased with such intensity, that it seemed as if the "roof would fall in,"—and Irene wished that it *would*.

Ma by this time, was also in a state of mind, bordering on hysterics. The stage manager who saw what was coming, had thoughtfully sent out to the "bar" for a little "straight," with "soda on the side." So when Irene dropped into a chair when she came off, and was just about to faint, she found a "life saver" held to her lips. She quickly polished it off. This seemed to revive her, and she thanked the stage manager, who was urging her "not to weaken, but to go on *again* and take another encore." but she declared it was impossible.

"For Heaven's sake go on—bow—do anything, so as to satisfy them, for by this time there was indeed "something doing" on the other side of the footlights and a perfect pandemonium prevailed. So Irene ventured out a few steps and "bowed. then started to exit, but the intensified "roar" from the front warned her that she had *better* "do something" and do it *quick*.

So out she went again to the centre of the stage, and as the racket partially subsided,

the trio of musicians came to her rescue by playing the introduction of her *special song*,—"Charley says I am an Angel."

It is needless to say, the author was right, for this song *did* "bring down the house" with a vengeance, and before she had time to explain *why* Charley called her an "angel," the audience was convulsed with a whirlwind of spasmodic, unearthly yells, and derisive laughter, and, for the first time it *dawned* on Irene, that they were *guying her*, and her face took on an expression *far* from "angelic." However, she managed to smother her mortification, and struggled through somehow with the second verse, in which, owing to her excitement, she got awfully "twisted" in the words,—but, after a desperate effort—she finished the song, and, in her frantic endeavor to make her exit, while wobbling off sideways, she bumped against the scenery, and fell headlong into the entrance.

This was the "cue" for another "tornado" of mocking laughter and unearthly shrieks, blended with the deafening pounding of beer glasses on the tables.

Lucky for Irene, that the stage manager caught her as she stumbled off the stage, or she would have completely "collapsed" during the fearful racket, so, in answer to his frantic gesticulations, (for his voice could not be heard above the uproar,) she *plucked* up courage, and, after removing her hat, sailed out again. This time to do her dance which in all justice it must be said, she *did* much better, in comparison, than she *sang* her songs.

She was just beginning to execute the "side twist" and "high kick" movement, when some one shouted in a loud voice—"We

don't want any more of that, give us the Hoo-chee-Coo-chee!" "Yes, that's the stuff, the Hoo-chee-Coo-chee" yelled a dozen more.

This was too much for Irene, so she brought her dance to an abrupt termination with a *pirouette*, and, running off the stage, she escaped from her tormentors, and rushed to the retreat of her dressing-room, where, with "Ma," she bewailed her fate.

Meanwhile the stage manager had his troubles, on account of Irene not re-appearing to disport herself in the sinuous, terpsichorean friskiosities of the "Midway." Finally the clamorous tumult subsided, quiet was restored—and the show went on.

After consoling each other, Ma and her daughter, who had now partially gotten over this *never to be forgotten* ordeal, were about to start to pack Irene's belongings in the trunk when a loud knock was heard on their door, looking out, Irene saw the "property boy," and asked "what was wanted?" He replied that he had been sent to tell her to get ready for her next turn.

At this—"Ma"—bristling with indignation, poked her head out and exclaimed:—

"What?—My daughter go on *that* stage again? Never.—

Just then the stage manager appeared and used all his persuasive powers to induce Irene to "get dressed for her second turn."

"Second turn?—I was not aware I had to go on again.

"Why certainly—everybody who plays here must do *three* turns. Come, hurry up, you're all over your nervousness now—get ready,—two songs will do this time—give them to me now and I'll send them out to the orchestra."

"I don't know any more songs."

"Then do another dance."

"I don't know another dance."

"Do something,—any old thing."

"I don't know anything else."

"Can't your mother sing?"

"No—her mother couldn't sing."

"Then you will have to sing two of your songs over again!"

"No"—interjaculaled Ma—she *won't* sing them over; she'll not go out before that howling mob to be *insulted* any more."

In vain did the stage manager plead.

By this time the proprietor of the establishment, who had been "in front" while the "doings" were "going on," came behind the scenes and "interviewed" Irene.

He broke it to her as gently as possible, and said, that while he was very *sorry* for her, still he was compelled to tell her that her engagement was *cancelled*, for it must be obvious to herself that she was too *inexperienced* to do a "turn." He found no fault with *her*, he only blamed the *agent* for sending him a *new beginner*, whom he must have known couldn't "fill the bill."

He complimented her highly, however, on her "make up" and "personal appearance," and this was at least *one* ray of sunshine to lessen the pang of her *severe* disappointment. Moreover, he offered to pay her fare, also her mother's, back to New York, which generous proposition, it is almost needless to say, was firmly but politely declined.

Thus ended Irene's "star" engagement.

While the show was still *progressing*, Ma and her daughter finished their packing and crept silently out from the "Excelsior Music

Hall" to consult a time table of the "Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad," and after a restless night and an early breakfast, they started, with their baggage (stripped of the proud labels), by the first train for New York, and arrived at their "flat" "sadder if not wiser."

Ah—the glitter and glare of the theatrical world, what hopes and ambitions have been nursed in the breast of many a young girl, whose aspirations and confidence in their ability often cause them to "o'er step themselves."

What expectations, and oh, what disappointments. The perpetual struggle in the brain, the sleepless uneasy nights of those who seek fame and fortune behind the foot-lights.

And now, in all kindness, we will drop the curtain on Irene Langham's first "*star*" engagement and her experience as a "*head-liner*" in the Vaudevilles.



THE MORAL, connected with this little romance is obvious; at any rate, this story (and it is a true one), should teach those who adopt the stage, no matter in what branch of the profession, to "walk ere they run," and to "look before they leap," and to remember that it is absolutely essential to possess *more* than "good looks and fine clothes," even though accompanied by the highest respectability, and even social standing or notoriety, to make an *instantaneous* and genuine success behind the footlights.

Beginners must also bear in mind that the *first* requisite necessary is a natural aptitude, "genius" or "talent;" of course a pretty face and handsome form are valuable adjuncts, especially for an ambitious girl. But remember that *no* theatrical or vaudeville "star" ever reached their position at *one bound*.

Hard work, untiring application added to *perseverance* will bring a gradual advancement "step by step"—then, when the *opportunity* presents itself, the door will be successfully opened to a brilliant stage career.

There are 3510 theatres of all grades in the United States at the dawn of the twentieth century, with 70 more building and projected, and over 600 travelling operatic, musical, vaudeville and minstrel organizations, large and small, (not including the circus contingent), averaging 15 in each company. There are also upwards of permanently located stock companies; add to this about

1200 vaudeville "specialty" artists, who are travelling week to week, playing "dates" in the "continuous" houses and variety theatres throughout the country, and about 1000 more between New York and San Francisco, who are unemployed and "looking for engagements," and it will foot up an aggregate of about 15,000 people now following the stage as an occupation.

Impelled by the same strange impulse of the "glamour of the footlights," hundreds more will augment this list during the present year.

How many of these will ever obtain favorable or remunerative prominence?

How many will reach the zenith of their ambition and become "Stars?"

How many will be wrecked on the rocky beach of the ocean of disappointment and failure, by attempting to grasp the "opportunity before they are *sure* of themselves?"

To some "opportunity" will *never* come.

Romances are not always in books, they are in life.









